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The following conclusions were reached after a study of the middle school years. (1) The middle school is an overwhelming success in operation. (2) Because of the age grouping and release of pressure from the secondary school, it has permitted the implementation of the philsophy of a transitional school. (3) The age grouping and educational philosophy requires a different focus for the guidance counselor's activities, necessitating a change in the areas of emphasis during his training. (4) The guidance requirements of the middle school indicate a need and the direction for the development of guidelines for preparation of counselors for the middle schools. (Author)

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GUIDANCE SERVICES IN THE FUNCTIONING MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Guidance Services In The Functioning Middle School

In February of 1966 the Clearing house published the findings of my study on the Middle School Organization (grades 5-6-7-8 or grades 6-7-8). Soon after, requests were directed to me from all parts of the country for information pertaining to both the administrative and guidance aspects of Middle Schools. These requests indicated a concern with the practical aspects of the administrative approach and of the guidance functions in the Middle School.

Guidelines for the secondary school program and the requirements for counselor education are fairly well established. ACES and ASCA appointed a committee, chaired by Sarah Leiter, to prepare similar guidelines for elementary schools. However, only tentative steps have been taken in this direction with reference to the Middle School population. At the North Atlantic Regional Conference of ACES, the membership passed the resolution:

> ". . . . that a committee be appointed to review the needs of the pre-adolescent-adolescent age group in order to arrive at recommendations for the establishment of a guidance program and the modification of counselor education programs so that the needs of the Middle School population can best be served."

I was appointed chairman, ex-officio, by President Garry Walz to act on this resolution.

There is adequate support in theory for the view that the Middle School population is unique and requires a different type of guidance program than does either the elementary or secondary school population. However, in developing guidelines for guidance services and counselor education programs, we must be primarily concerned with practical considerations. This study, therefore, was designed to find answers to such practical questions as:

> Is the Middle School successful in actual functioning?
>
> Is the educational program, in fact, modified for this age grouping?
>
> What are the guidance practices and guidance needs of the Middle School population?
>
> Is guidance services important for this group?

I contacted all of the fifty state departments of education, school districts that had not previously been contacted, and checked all available directories. With the list of Middle Schools developed from my previous research as a nucleus, I compiled a revised list of more than 1,000 middle schools throughout the country. Questionnaires were then sent to the administrators of each of these schools. Of the 500 responses, 385 indicated that they were functioning with grades 5 through 8 or 6 through 8. The responses were from 37 of the 45 states known to have one or more middle schools functioning at that time. The student enrollment of the responding

schools ranged from 100 to 2,000 pupils. The number of responses from each state were in approximately the same proportion to the total number of schools contacted. Consequently, the data obtained can be considered as fairly representative of the national trends in the functioning of Middle Schools.

A detailed discussion of the wealth of quantitative and qualitative data contained in the responses would require much more time than has been allotted for this presentation. Consequently, I shall merely present the highlights of the findings.

There appears to be little doubt that the Middle School is an overwhelming success in practice. Of all the respondents, 88 per cent indicated that, based on their experience, they would recommend the Middle School. However, there was a strong indication that a grouping of grades 6 through 8 was preferred to that of grades 5 through 8. It appears that the students in grades 6 through 8 are reasonably homogeneous and permit the development of an integrated and coordinated program. The inclusion of grade 5 often creates social as well as educational difficulties.

The list of advantages derived from the overwhelming number of positive responses appears to be a recapitulation, but from practical experience, of the theoretical claims made for the Middle School. The

grouping, according to the respondents, has numerous social and developmental advantages. The Middle School has an even larger number of educational advantages, many of which are the result of the release from pressures associated with the secondary schools. This grade organization has permitted a shift in focus to a child centered orientation and the development of a truly transitional educational program. This is reflected in the variability and flexibility of the educational programs reported. The regular schedule appears to be a base from which a wide range of explorations are attempted in search of a program that can be adapted to meet the needs of the students.

The data points to two important guidance needs of the Middle School. The first of course, is the need for greater availability of guidance counselors and guidance services. At this time, 50 per cent of the schools have full time counselors and another 25 per cent have part time services of a counselor. Often, this part time availability of the counselor merely consists of his being on call, when the need arises, from the high school. As might have been anticipated, counselors are more frequently available in schools with grades 6 through 8 than in schools with grades 5 through 8. Yet the opinion of many of the respondents was that guidance at this level was more important than at the other levels.

The second guidance need indicated by the study relates to the education of guidance counselors for the Middle School. The respondents almost unanimously agree that Middle School counselors should be certified. More than 75 per cent of them believe that the Middle School counselors should have training that emphasizes different areas than does the training of the secondary school counselors. These areas of emphasis are related to the educational philosophy and the uniqueness of the age group. Thus, the belief among the respondents is that there should be greater emphasis on training to work with teachers, understanding the age group in their development andnthe social pressures impinging on them, testing and test interpretation, learning theory, curriculum and group work.

The conclusions are obvious and can be summarized as follows:

1. The Middle School is an overwhelming success in operation.

2. Because of the age grouping and release of pressure from the secondary school, it has permitted the implementation of the philosophy of a transitional school.

3. The age grouping and educational philosophy requires a different focus for the guidance counselors activities, necessitating a change in the areas of emphasis during his training.

4. The guidance requirements of the Middle School indicate a need for and the direction for the development of guidelines for preparation of counselors for the Middle Schools.

To date, most discussions of the Middle School were based either on theoretical speculations or the practical experiences of one school or school system. This study offers factual data relative to the functioning of Middle Schools throughout the country. Such factual data has a wide range of applicability.